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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 001186

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: GOK BEGINNING TO WONDER IF MUMBAI-TYPE ATTACKS  
COULD HAPPEN HERE

REF: KUWAIT 1174

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and  
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11. (C) Summary: As reported reftel, Kuwaitis were shocked and horrified by the November 26-29 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. The fact that at least nine Kuwaitis -- including several women from prominent Kuwaiti families -- were trapped in a hotel room during the siege brought home to many the fact that terrorism is a threat that respects neither nationality, gender, or age. Kuwaitis were generally positive about the GOK's forward-leaning response to the attacks, including an immediate condemnation of the attacks by the Foreign Minister with an offer of assistance to India.

The GOK also set up a hot-line through its Embassy in New Delhi to provide information to concerned citizens, and facilitated transportation back to Kuwait for citizens wishing to leave the scene. At least some Kuwaitis are asking if Kuwait, with its many hotels and vulnerable infrastructure, could become the target of such an attack. While some Kuwaiti officials appear chastened by the attacks, it is not clear that the GOK is prepared to act decisively to prevent such an occurrence here. Mid-level GOK officials continue to deny any link between the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) and terrorists groups, including the Lashkar e-Tayibba. Post has also discussed Mumbai ramifications with the Indian and Pakistani embassies in Kuwait. End Summary.

GOK Considers Steps to Protect the Homeland

12. (C) In the days following the attacks, POLCOUNS queried Ambassador Khalid Al-Muqames, MFA's Director for Follow-up and Coordination, and Shaykh Fawas Mishal Al Sabah, Director of the National Security Bureau's International Relations Department, about their views on the Mumbai events and their sense of what steps the GOK can or will take to prevent a similar attack from happening in Kuwait. POLCOUNS also noted widespread press speculation that the Mumbai attacks were conducted by the terrorist organization Lashkar e-Tayyiba (LT), an organization allegedly linked to the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), and cited in that context in the June 2008 USG announcement designating RIHS as a terrorist-financing entity. GOK officials regularly deny that RIHS has any terrorist connections and have repeatedly asked USG counterparts for evidence confirming such links. POLCOUNS also noted to GOK interlocutors that an Embassy-hosted terrorism training exercise planned for January, which is intended to include Kuwaiti participation, could provide a good opportunity for Kuwait to proactively prepare for terrorist incidents and demonstrate that it is not likely to be a soft target.

13. (C) In response to POLCOUNS inquiries, Ambassador Maqames asserted that the GOK was aghast over the Mumbai events, noting the FM's quick and clear condemnation of the attacks and his offer to assist the Indian government in any way. The GOK, he said, stands ready to do what it can to cooperate with India to forestall future attacks, although he offered few specifics on what the GOK might do. Turning to the domestic scene, Muqames said the GOK is somewhat concerned that a terrorist attack could take place here, since "terrorism has no time or place," but security authorities are on alert and "ready for anything." Muqames rejected the idea that there could be any link between LT and RIHS, insisting that RIHS is a charitable entity that operates under the Kuwaiti legal system and is under the purview of MFA. "We are confident they are OK, he said, and the facts do not support Treasury's claims." Muqames called for "more and better" international cooperation to combat terrorism and resolve the root causes that give rise to terrorism. He acknowledged, as his personal view, that the carrying out of the Embassy-planned CT exercise in January could send a positive signal that Kuwait is a proactive partner in the fight against terrorism.

14. (C) National Security Bureau's Shaykh Fawaz Mishal Al Sabah told POLCOUNS that he and his organization had followed the attacks attentively and were impressed by the ruthless efficiency of the attackers. He stated that the GOK is, indeed, concerned that something similar could happen in Kuwait. Underscoring the point that terrorism is close to home, Shaykh Fawaz introduced one of two deputies present in the room, noting that the individual's mother was one of a group of Kuwaiti women trapped in the Taj Mahal Hotel during

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the incidents, all of whom eventually escaped unharmed. Shaykh Fawaz asserted that the GOK takes seriously its responsibility to protect Kuwait from such incidents and, in their wake, is taking steps to understand what happened in Mumbai and raise awareness here. Several GOK ministries, he noted, have been asked to contribute their assessments, with the Ministry of the Interior taking the lead on developing plans to protect government and commercial buildings. The NSB, he added, chairs a committee on Critical Infrastructure Protection, a project that has been under way for some time. He said the committee has made good progress on meeting the recommendations of an interagency USG team that visited in March 2007 and expects to have implemented all of the team's recommendations by early 2009. Responding to POLCOUNS observation that the Mumbai attacks had focused on hotels and other civilian infrastructure, Shaykh Fawaz asserted that all of Kuwait's major hotels already have security and a police presence, but the need for additional protection is being reassessed in the wake of Mumbai. Commenting on the alleged LT-RIHS connection, Shaykh Fawaz remarked only that the GOK continues to await evidence from the USG.

15. (C) During a December 3 meeting with a visiting CENTCOM team, MFA America's Desk Director Ali Al-Sammak commented that participating in the global war on terrorism is one of the GOK's highest priorities, but insisted that the GOK has little capacity to advance the cause to a significant degree. The principal responsibility, he suggested, rests with the USG, although the GOK is "ready to help in any way it can".

Pakistani and Indian Charges Promise Cooperation  
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16. (C) POLCOUNS on December 2 also called on the Pakistani Charge in Kuwait, Sajjad Ahmad Seehar. Seehar, expressing anguish over the incidents, insisted that the Pakistani government will do its utmost to track down any persons responsible for the attacks. Commenting on the alleged LT connection to the Mumbai attacks, Seehar noted that the organization has committed atrocities in its homeland and is banned there. Ignorance and poverty make Pakistan fertile terrain for terrorists, Seehar observed, adding that his

country needs to focus on a long-term strategy of education and awareness to forstall terrorist influences on the young. Turning to his conversations with the GOK, Seehad said he had only had "informal" conversations with Kuwaiti counterparts on the subject of terrorism. One possible area of concern, he noted, is the presence of some 150,000 Pakistani workers in Kuwait, almost all of whom are male and many of whom work in the oil and construction sectors. As the Pakistanis are, by and large, educated workers making good salaries, there are few indications of restiveness, although he acknowledged that such a large population could easily include a few "radicals".

¶7. (C) The Indian Charge, during a December 4 conversation with the DCM, said he would highlight the June 2008 U.S. statement designating RIHS, particularly the alleged LT connection, to his government and request follow-up instructions.

Comment  
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¶8. (C) While some Kuwaiti officials appear chastened by the Mumbai attacks, it is less clear that the GOK's talk of putting proactive plans into motion will bear fruit, beyond a heightened police presence around hotels and other infrastructure -- for now -- and perhaps heightened receptivity to any signals from abroad that could relate to impending attacks on Kuwaiti soil. There is a certain passivity built into Kuwaiti governmental structures and a sense of reliance on the USG and other partners to take the lead in identifying and forestalling threats from outside. As noted septels, now would be a timely moment to present the GOK with fresh evidence to document the link between LT and RIHS. End Comment.

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